

NIETZSCHE ON TRUTH IN THE CONTEXTS OF NIHILISM AND HEALTH

A Thesis

by

ALI ELAMIN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2007

Major Subject: Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Nietzsche on Truth in the Contexts of Nihilism and Health. (December 2007)

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In this project, I develop Nietzsche's account of truth based on the two perspectives of nihilism and health and conclude that his varied analyses and comments from the early and late periods of his writing are compatible.

Nietzsche's discussions of truth are divided into two parts. First, the discussion of the *concept* of truth. Second, he analyzes modern culture that considers the highest type the one that seeks truth. His discussion of the concept of truth involves a critique of the thing-in-itself and Correspondence Theory. The subtle point to get is that Nietzsche never denies the existence of a real world in which we live. However, his critique is of human's ability to arrive at this truth. I argue that his attack on the concept of the thing-in-itself in the late notebooks is aimed at showing the metaphysical incoherence of the concepts of thinghood and self-identity and not on the concept of an unknown grounding existence.

As for the second discussion, I argue that Nietzsche condemns truth-seeking insofar as it is held as the highest ideal in a culture. When this occurs, the *will to truth* in cultures and individuals becomes tyrannical and stems the growth of the person as a complete self, with varied drives and impulses.

Finally, I conclude that Nietzsche hopes to overcome nihilism by breaking the tyranny that has taken over society which is governed by a *will to nothingness*, which depreciates the value of life. He understands the immensity of the task of overcoming this will, and understands that he can only be part of a larger context of combating nihilism. Accordingly, he sees his role as reintroducing man to his body and his physiology and to bring back the experimentation and playful seriousness in the art of living life as opposed to the life-sacrificing and life-denying type that thinks of the pursuit of truth as a relinquishment of life.

DEDICATION

To those who are lost and find themselves, only to lose themselves again.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche's position on truth is one of the most important clues to decoding the rest of his philosophy. To understand exactly how radical his departure is from traditional metaphysics, we must first analyze his different comments on truth and see whether they amount to a coherent whole. The central question I wish to address in the second chapter of this thesis is whether Nietzsche's writings allow for a unified account of truth or whether, on the contrary, we would be forced to divide his writings into early and late periods, or even see them as contradictory, as some have claimed.¹

Without a clear grasp of this aspect of his philosophy, we would not be in a clear enough position to understand Nietzsche's intentions in much of the other main topics he discusses. For example, without an adequate understanding of Nietzsche's position on truth, it is hard to understand exactly what he thinks his genealogical method arrives at, or what his view of metaphysics is, and the scope of nihilism; and even the very nature of nihilism as Nietzsche saw it will elude us because to understand that, it is essential to understand Nietzsche's critique of the *will to truth* and to figure out how much of truth-seeking Nietzsche believes is motivated by *will to truth*, if not all.

After reviewing the different writings which have been used to make the case for a lack of continuity in Nietzsche's account, I argue for the reading that Nietzsche

This thesis follows the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

¹ Clark, Maudemarie. *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 92.

presents one unified account of the concept of truth throughout his career. His argument is that some kind of thing-in-itself exists which is not really thing nor itself, since he rejects thinghood and self-identity apart from a constituting agent to introduce them into the world.

His ultimate conclusion is that we can say about the world that it is the product of centers of force acting upon each other. This conclusion may be cast as metaphysical; since Nietzsche presents an explanation of the apparent world with a world that is veiled from our immediate attention. The difference, however, is that Nietzsche's account does not cater to the demands of the *will to truth* that the world be constant, stable, eternal, replete with rigid unities. Nietzsche's metaphysics is that of the world we live in, of change, becoming, of changing unities, and so on.

His struggle, then, is not with a metaphysics that posits the existence of truth, but against the type of human being that is hailed as the highest type in modern culture, while it is no more than the purest manifestation of the *will to nothingness* as of yet. Nietzsche believes that his cultural dissections of the world reveal a gradual disenchantment with life, and that beings have a *will to nothingness* which influences them unconsciously into behaving in certain ways, and believing certain things. This *will to nothingness* is what makes human beings weary of life, expect too much of it, reject it, and create imaginary, ideal worlds to depreciate it. He concludes that most religions, philosophies, and belief systems are no more than beliefs in other worlds for the purpose of depreciating this world and strengthening this *will to nothingness*. "The ideal world

has hitherto been the actual force for disparaging the world and man, the poisonous vapor over reality, the great *seduction to nothingness*.”²

History, so far, has been the process of the *will to nothingness* overtaking mankind through time. This is manifested in the Christian dominance over most of the world, and then when it saw it was strong enough to grow without the help of God, it manifested itself in science which overthrew God, and claimed, falsely, to be the savior from the ascetic ideal which was the highest ideal in the realm of Christianity. But Nietzsche believes science to be a purer and more powerful manifestation of the *will to truth*, and therefore certainly not an antidote for it, as its champions amongst the thinkers of the Enlightenment promised it to be.

So far, the analysis lacks a clear direction. If Nietzsche believes history to be the process of the *will to nothingness* overtaking humanity under several veils, and if the *will to truth* which the modern age sets up as the highest type of society after having overthrown the self-mutilating priest, is also nothing more than a tool of the *will to nothingness*, what does Nietzsche propose we do in order to counter the *will to nothingness*? What would be a good antidote? Ultimately, the question boils down to what every philosophy is supposed to be an answer for: how ought we to live our lives?

In Chapter II, I attempt to give an answer to this very hard question. In its general framework, the question is very easy to answer: Nietzsche wants to effect a shift in truth-seeking from seeking the truth about the real, the true, and so on, to an investigation of the truth about the cultural conditions that produce healthy, interesting, creative, serious,

² Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Ed. Walter Kaufman, trs. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 210, aphorism 390.

cheerful human beings who can create their own destiny—sovereign individuals. He wants a change in cultural conditions so that the highest type of human being would shift from the serious scientist who uses truth as an escape from life, into the more complete human being who uses truth for the enhancement of life.

What is hard to determine is what exactly this amounts to. What method is there for us to distinguish the tools of the *will to nothingness* and the depreciation of life from the tools for the enhancement of life? What exactly is a more diversified, complete, sovereign human being?

Nietzsche believes that the world is too replete with uncertainty to afford us straight answers to these questions. But he believes that his genealogical method is one of the tools we can use to determine whether what we are doing is an escape from life, a reaction and judgment against it, or whether we do it out of a will to health and the enhancement of life. The conclusion will not be definitive but the very asking for a straight and definite path toward what enhances life is a rejection of the uncertainty which is at the heart of living, and thus is a manifestation of the *will to nothingness* in us. What Nietzsche provides are only general clues based, ultimately, on his view of what life really is like.

Life, for Nietzsche, is uncertain, false, unknown, deceptive, becoming, changing, contradictory, affective, involves an order of rank, and immoral. Any kind of action or belief that betrays a wish for a world that is devoid of one of these essential characteristics of life is probably a manifestation of the *will to nothingness*, and a rejection of life. In order to combat this will, we have to accept life as it is. We have to

accept contradictions, accept that not everyone is equal; and live our life without allowing the tyranny of any one drive or will over all the others.

CHAPTER II

TRUTH: CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS AND THE EXTENT OF THE NIHILISM CRITIQUE

In this chapter, I will explain how Nietzsche's comments on truth are unified into one position. Then, I will use my account to point out where two interpretations go awry; on one extreme, interpretations claiming that Nietzsche completely rejects the usefulness of truth, and, on the other, those that say he sought truth for its own sake. Sarah Kofmann's discussion of Nietzsche's substituting metaphor for concept in her article *Metaphor, Symbol and Metamorphosis*,³ is taken as a prime example of the position of Nietzsche's complete rejection of the usefulness of truth, and so is Richard Rorty's position who believes that Nietzsche wants us to cease believing that truth has anything to offer us. On the other hand, Richard Schacht will be taken as a prime example of the interpretation that Nietzsche embraces and seeks truth for its own sake.

Nietzsche's Discussion of the Concept of Truth

Nietzsche uses the word truth in his discussion in two senses. First, there is the sense of truth for truth's sake, and there are several discussions, especially in his early notebooks, where he criticizes this concept rather harshly. However, his comments can be interpreted as a concentrated attack on a certain account of truth, and not on the concept itself. The second use of the word concerns Nietzsche's truth in the sense of something useful, practical, for the purposes of advancing life. In this sense, Nietzsche

³ Kofman, Sarah. "Metaphor, Symbol, Metamorphosis." *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1977), 201.

embraces the concept and says for example that “truth is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live.”⁴ The use of truth and truth-seeking is only beneficial when it “legitimize(s) itself before another tribunal: -- as a means of the preservation of man, as *will to power*.”⁵ So the pursuit of truth for Nietzsche is not inimical to life when it is subdued and controlled. Let us now turn to Nietzsche’s comments on the concept of truth.

We are told by Maudemarie Clark in her book *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, that Nietzsche did not prove the non-existence of truth in his early writings in “Truth and Lies in the Extra-moral Sense,” but rather that he had two confused, incompatible views on the denial of the concept. The first “is the Kantian version Nietzsche adopts throughout most of the essay. Transcendent truth is both conceivable and of overriding value, but unattainable for human beings. The second is neo-Kantian or Nietzschean. Transcendent truth is inconceivable, a contradiction in terms.”⁶ Of course, Nietzsche *did not* prove the non-existence of truth. To think that he has done so is to misconstrue his remark in the following quote as referring to the concept of transcendent truth itself, *without* reference to a knower: “‘the adequate expression of an object in the subject’—is a contradictory impossibility.”⁷

⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 272, aphorism 493.

⁵ Ibid., p. 272, aphorism 495.

⁶ Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 92.

⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “On Truth and Lies in A Nonmoral Sense.” *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s*. Ed. and Tr. Daniel Breazeale. (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), p. 86, aphorism 1.

Nietzsche specifically says: “Are these designations congruent with things? Is language the adequate expression of all realities? ... It is only by means of forgetfulness that man can ever reach the point of fancying himself to possess a ‘truth’ *of the grade just indicated.*”⁸ Thus, Nietzsche is clearly assailing the correspondence theory of truth, or what Clark calls transcendent truth. However, he is also attacking a grade of that kind of truth that is certain. In other words, his critique is of the claim that we can be certain of the fact that any belief of ours corresponds with the reality of the world as it is. He bases this on the fact that our contact with reality is based on perception, and even assuming that the cause of the nerve stimuli which constitute perception is outside of us (whatever that might be) is “false and unjustif(ied).” Nature remains concerned “only with an X which remains inaccessible and undefinable for us,”⁹ for otherwise, we would have to judge our perception according to a “criterion of the correct perception, which means, in accordance with a criterion which is *not available.*” Nietzsche continues to say that “in any case, it seems... that the ‘correct perception’—which would mean ‘the adequate expression of an object in the subject’—is a contradictory impossibility.”¹⁰ He explains that he thinks this because of the fact that there is no way to bridge the gap between subject and object except aesthetically, which means the physiological process of transforming the nerve stimulus into an image, and then that image into a sound.¹¹ Consciousness’ contact is only with perception, i.e., with the data that result from this

⁸ Ibid., p. 81, aphorism 1.

⁹ Ibid., p. 83, aphorism 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 86, aphorism 1.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 82, aphorism 1.

aesthetic process of turning nerve stimuli into images, therefore, it is a contradictory impossibility for us to consciously get at the true nature of the world. In other words, the very fact of “getting at” in the act of “getting at the world,” involves an aesthetic relation which anthropomorphizes (and thus potentially falsifies) the world, and thus since we can never tell when this anthropomorphizing effect falsifies reality and when it does not, we can never be certain about reality and thing in itself.

Granted, there is no literal contradiction here of the grade of “X is and is not at the same time, in the same sense, etc...,” however, this interpretation of the quote which assumes a loose use of language on Nietzsche’s part is justified by what Nietzsche follows the quote with. He says right after ‘contradictory impossibility’: “For between two absolutely different spheres, as between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is, at most, an aesthetic relation.”¹² Thus, the focus is on the nature of the subject and the nature of the object and how adequate knowledge by the former of the latter is not possible. But what does not possible here mean? It means no more than Nietzsche’s initial position when he rejected the possibility of certainty with respect to any correspondence account of truth. He is saying that certain knowledge of the source of our nerve stimuli based on perception is impossible due to the nature of perception itself. Furthermore, since perception is our only venue of contact with said source, certain knowledge of things in themselves is impossible for us. In other words, he is not rejecting the possibility of accidental correspondence “that would of course be a dogmatic assertion and, as such, would be just as indemonstrable as its

¹² Ibid., p. 86, aphorism 1.

opposite,”¹³ but that it is *not possible* for us to know whether our knowledge ever does correspond or not.

So, contrary to Clark’s claim, Nietzsche’s critique of the concept of transcendent truth is complementary and unified in “Truth and Lies in the Extra-Moral Sense,” and it targets certainty and correspondence theories of truth. Breazeale suggests that Nietzsche’s critique in the early notebooks is unified and coherent, but worries that Nietzsche “may later have become (critical) of this distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘appearance’,”¹⁴ also pointing out that his concern springs from a section of *Twilight of the Idols* titled: “How the ‘Real World’ at last Became a Myth.”

In that section, Nietzsche says that he is tracing the “history of an error.”¹⁵ He traces the idea of a “real world” from Plato, to Christianity, to Kant, and finally to himself, where he reasons: “unattainable? Unattained, at any rate. And if unattained also *unknown*. Consequently also no consolation, no redemption, no duty: How could we have a duty toward something unknown?... the ‘real world’ – an idea no longer of any use, not even a duty any longer – an idea grown useless, superfluous, *consequently* a refuted idea: let us abolish it!”¹⁶ If we pay close attention to the reasoning here, which is highlighted and emphasized by Nietzsche’s own italics, it becomes evident that we are no longer speaking about the same kind of truth that Nietzsche was discussing earlier. In

¹³ Ibid., p. 84, aphorism 1.

¹⁴ Breazeale, Daniel. “Introduction.” *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s*. Ed. and Tr. Daniel Breazeale. (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), p. xxvii, footnote 21.

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 50.

¹⁶ Ibid..

the earlier discussion, the concept of truth was being discussed as truth in itself, i.e., as truth that is determined only by the standards of what is true. Thus, since we are talking about truth for truth's sake, Nietzsche admitted that the thing in itself exists and is unknowable. However, the logic here is beyond the logic of truth for truth's sake. The truth-seeking that is exhibited in Nietzsche's reasoning smells of Nietzsche's new logic of controlled truth, based on reflection about usefulness for life and health. The indictment against the real world is not that it is false (Nietzsche's designation of the real world as an error merely refers to his idea that any human conjecture about truth in itself is necessarily unverifiable and thus false in the strict sense of uncertain), but that it is no longer useful; it has become superfluous, and *consequently* it is a refuted idea.

So, Nietzsche does not reject the Kantian account of truth even in his late writings, he merely sets it aside by introducing a new logic, which is supposed to be buttressed by new impulses and drives, which is the mark of how his new philosophers will deal with truth: "what is *great* has a right to history, but not a history of the iconic sort; rather, it merits a *productive and stimulating canvas of historical events*. We leave the *graves undisturbed*: we take possession of what is eternally alive."¹⁷ For history, here, truth, in general can be substituted by the new logic of truth-conducive-to-health, the understanding of which requires a look at Nietzsche's critique of what he calls "*will to truth*."

¹⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle Between Art and Knowledge." *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*. Ed. and Tr. Daniel Breazeale. (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), p. 13, aphorism 41.

The 'Will to truth' vs. 'Use of Truth'

It is possible to gain much insight into Nietzsche's approach to truth by turning to his discussion of what he calls creditor-debtor relationship in the *Genealogy of Morals*. The debtor-creditor relationship is the contractual relationship between human beings of past times, where if a person (a debtor) wanted to borrow something from another person (a creditor), he would have to pledge something in case of failure to keep the promise of returning what was borrowed. This relationship, Nietzsche argues, through its instruments of punishment, injury, and cruelty, creates a bad conscience in the noble types. The noble type is the one that "experiences itself as determining values; does not need approval; it judges, 'what is harmful to me is harmful in itself;' it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is value-creating."¹⁸

When a debtor failed to keep his promise to a creditor, the creditor used to collect what was due to him in the currency of sadism -- causing the debtor physical pain, and satisfying one's sadistic feelings. Through "a great deal of severity, cruelty, and pain,"¹⁹ memory developed and was enhanced. To inspire trust, the debtor needed to substitute something he possessed as payment in case of failure of payment: wife, freedom, life, or afterlife, but mainly the body.²⁰ Because the price of forgetting was so high, this was the start of the creation of memory, prudence, caution, self-criticism, "'Injury makes one prudent,' says the proverb: insofar as it makes one prudent it also makes one bad.

¹⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*, Trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1990), Section 260.

¹⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Tr. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 64.

²⁰ Ibid..

Fortunately, it frequently makes people stupid.”²¹ Legal systems developed from the necessity to determine how much pain and suffering was equal to what kind of broken promise. The debtor-creditor relationship and its dynamic create a whole moral conceptual world built out of “guilt,” “conscience,” “duty,” “sacredness of duty,” all of which, Nietzsche argues, have their origin in the sphere of legal obligations.²² How was this moral conceptual world created?

As political organization developed, and humans were forced into societies, with rules and laws, the “instinct for freedom (was) forcibly made latent... pushed back and repressed, incarcerated with and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what the bad conscience is in its beginnings.”²³ As animals we have a tendency to hurt, and when this tendency’s natural expression outward is blocked, we inflict the hurt on ourselves. Thus, our sadism becomes masochism – and since for Nietzsche the unity of self is a mere effect of the struggle of different drives and impulses²⁴: sado-masochism.²⁵

As this instinct to self-torture was spiritualized and enhanced, all sorts of ascetic practices were developed as ways to reject and torture the body and everything that is of this world in the self. “the earth (is) the distinctively ascetic planet, a nook of

²¹ Ibid., 83.

²² Ibid., 65.

²³ Ibid., 87.

²⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Nietzsche: Writings From the Late Notebooks*. Ed. Rudiger Bittner, Tr. Kate Sturge, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), section: “Notebook 10, Autumn 1887,” note 19, page 178. See also notebook 40, notes 21 and 42.

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 92.

disgruntled, arrogant, and offensive creatures filled with a profound disgust at themselves, at the earth, at all life, who inflict as much pain on themselves as they possibly can out of pleasure in inflicting pain – which is probably their only pleasure.” The ascetic ideal “springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence... life struggles with it and through it with death and against death; the ascetic ideal is an artifice for the preservation of life... more precisely against disgust with life, against exhaustion, against the desire for the ‘end.’”²⁶ So the ascetic ideal is the instinct to life in weak and sickly humans. Their inability to affirm life prompts them to weary of it and reject it. However, in their weariness, in their rejection, they find their “restless energy,” they find their yes for life. “Even when he wounds himself, this master of destruction, of self-destruction—the very wound itself afterward compels him to live.”²⁷ Thus Nietzsche asks in the *Will to Power*, “Is an increase in virtuousness compatible with an increase in cleverness and insight? Dubito; only too often I shall have occasion to show the reverse. Has virtuousness as a goal not hitherto been in the most rigorous sense incompatible with being happy? Does it not, on the contrary, require misfortune, self-denial and self-mistreatment as a necessary means?”²⁸ Our yes to life, our spiritualization, and ennobling of the basic instincts; everything higher in life comes at the price of self-negation, pain, and suffering.

²⁶ Ibid., 120.

²⁷ Ibid., 121.

²⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 211, aphorism 393.

Science, scientists, the faith of the Enlightenment, are all historical developments that claim to be the antithesis of everything about the ascetic ideal. The *will to truth* in them has vanquished the belief in “God, the beyond, and the virtues of denial.”²⁹ However, Nietzsche argues, “science,” and the *will to truth* “are rather the latest and noblest form of” the ascetic ideal³⁰ and the *will to nothingness*: “To sacrifice God to nothingness – this paradoxical mystery of the ultimate act of cruelty was reserved for the generation which is even now arising: we all know something of it already.”³¹ He claims that the godlessness of the wave of scholars and philosophers who overthrew God, is not at all an indication of their triumph over the ascetic ideal, “those last idealists left among philosophers and scholars: are they perhaps the desired opponents of the ascetic ideal, the counteridealists? Indeed, they believe they are, these ‘unbelievers’ (for that is what they are, one and all); they are so serious on this point, so passionate about it in word and gesture, that the faith that they are opponents of this ideal seems to be the last remnant of faith they have left.”³² Thus, the thinkers of the Enlightenment with their adamant rejection of God are a purer form of the *will to truth* than the religious type, because they no longer need God in order to deny life. “The conscientiousness in small things, the self-control of the religious man were a preparatory school for the scientific

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 146.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

³¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 81.

³² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 148.

character: above all, the disposition that takes problems seriously, regardless of the personal consequences.”³³

Nietzsche continues, “we ‘men of knowledge’ have gradually come to mistrust believers of all kinds... wherever the strength of a faith is very prominently displayed, we infer a certain weakness of demonstrability, even the improbability of what is believed.”³⁴ Ultimately, Nietzsche rejects the claim of these new “so-called free spirits”—that they are the countermovement against the ascetic ideal—for a very important reason: “that which constrains these men, however, this *unconditional will to truth*, is faith in the ascetic ideal itself... it is the faith in a metaphysical value, the absolute value of truth, sanctioned and guaranteed by this ideal alone.”³⁵ So, for Nietzsche, unconditional faith itself, in anything, is a kind of rejection and denial of this life. The philosophers of the enlightenment and all those with an absolute faith in truth have killed God and crowned truth in his place as the prosecutor of this world and its depreciator.

So, here, Nietzsche aims his criticism at the *will to truth* and not at truth itself. In several places, Nietzsche attempts to explain what the *will to truth* is by adding adjectives to it like unconditional,³⁶ or by talking about mastery of the knowledge

³³ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 262, aphorism 469.

³⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 148.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁶ *Ibid.*.

drive.³⁷ At other times, Nietzsche calls it the “pathos of truth,” as for example in an unpublished essay by that title from the year 1872. Daniel Brezeale explains that “in addition to the ordinary sense of the English word, it also means ‘vehemence,’ ‘ardor,’ ‘solemnity,’ and ‘fervor.’ ... thus an investigation of the ‘pathos of truth’ is not an investigation of ‘truth itself,’ but is instead concerned with man’s feelings about truth.”³⁸ In his late Notebooks from the year 1887, Nietzsche even attempts a definition of the *will to truth*: “the *will to truth* is a *making* fixed, a *making* true and lasting, a removing from sight of that *false* character, its reinterpretation into something that *is*.”³⁹ Thus, since the world is essentially becoming and change, this is tantamount to a rejection of life. “this longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself—all this means—lets us dare to grasp it—a *will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life.”⁴⁰

The *will to truth* for Nietzsche is one of the tools that the *will to nothingness* uses in order to deny and impoverish life. It is the drive to truth at all costs, where the person who is under its influence spends all his energies in pursuit of developing this one impulse and drive. It is the psychological attitude that truth is the most valuable thing in human life and everything should be sacrificed in order to attain it. Thus, all the other impulses are suppressed for the sake of this one impulse toward knowledge and truth.

³⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “On the Pathos of Truth.” *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s*. Ed. and Tr. Daniel Brezeale. (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), p. 14 note 43; p. 16, note 46; p. 17, note 48; p. 22, note 55; p. 23, note 61.

³⁸ Ibid., 61, 1n.

³⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Nietzsche: Writings From the Late Notebooks*. Section: “Notebook 9, Autumn 1887,” 155.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 162.

We shall see in Chapter III that Nietzsche believes this psychological attitude to be grounded in a physiological type of human being, who then forces his perspective on all the other types.

It must be stressed here that what is repugnant about the *will to truth*, as it is rejected here, is its unconditionality, and its absolute metaphysical value; that is what smells of the ascetic ideal in the *will to truth*. So, Nietzsche wants to overcome the *will to truth* and not any use or thinking of the world in terms of *any* concept of truth. He does not aim at eliminating all thinking about the concept of truth, nor does he think that our pursuit of truth is inimical to life however we go about pursuing it. Instead, his objection is to the *will to truth as a governing will* in the person that harbors it.

The difficulty of Nietzsche's task is increased by the fact that "apart from the ascetic ideal, man, the human animal, had no meaning so far."⁴¹ With the *will to truth* being the purest form of the ascetic ideal. Thus, the task of overcoming the *will to truth* is a very hard one. Nietzsche sets himself against the whole history of humanity. But he does not do that in a simplistic way, for he recognizes that he himself is a product of the *will to truth*, and that in him it "becomes conscious of itself as a *problem*."⁴² Thus, Nietzsche opposes the whole history of humanity that is present *within him*. His philosophy is self-concerned. Another instance where Nietzsche considers himself a product of the ascetic ideal is in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he mentions

⁴¹ Ibid..

⁴² Ibid., 161.

philosophers, scholars, pedants⁴³ and uses the pronoun “we,” and wonders whether the new philosophers will also be of the same type, that is, products of the ascetic ideal. This means that he is not setting himself as different from the ascetic ideal, and knows himself to be, at least initially, within its range. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche concludes: “here I again touch on *my* problem, on *our* problem, my unknown friends (for as yet I know of no friend): what meaning would our whole being possess if it were not this, that in us the *will to truth* becomes conscious of itself as a *problem*?”⁴⁴

There are two main ways of interpreting this conclusion. First, Nietzsche could be the one in whom the *will to truth* comes to see itself as a problem because he, as an outsider, helps it achieve that realization. Or, Nietzsche could be saying that as a product of the *will to truth* himself, he has come to view himself (insofar as he is *will to truth*) as a problem. That Nietzsche speaks of himself in *Beyond Good and Evil* as another product of the ascetic ideal, makes it clear that the second interpretation of the quotation is the correct one. Nietzsche is saying: we are the *will to truth*, and we have stumbled upon how problematic we are. But how did this transition actually occur? Why did the *will to truth* revolt against the project of religious ascetic ideal?

Nietzsche believes that the project of Christianity (bad conscience, ascetic ideal, *will to truth*, faith, God, punishment, guilt, afterlife) as a defense against nihilism has lost its power. He does not argue against this worldview on the grounds that it is false. His most basic conviction is that beliefs are symptoms of underlying forces. “Judgments,

⁴³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 73.

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 161.

value judgments concerning life, for or against, can in the last resort never be true: they possess value only as symptoms, they come into consideration only as symptoms – in themselves such judgments are stupidities.”⁴⁵ However, this project was part of our breeding, and we cannot escape its effects in the modern age: most poignantly, that it has culminated in a well-entrenched *will to truth* in us.

Nietzsche explains his interest in questioning the *will to truth* in *Beyond Good and Evil*. He says, “what questions this *will to truth* has already set before us! What strange, wicked, questionable questions! It is already a long story – yet does it not seem as if it has only just begun? Is it any wonder we should at last grow distrustful, lose our patience, turn impatiently away?”⁴⁶ In other words, this *will to truth* which is tyrannizing the vast majority of human energy must be put to the test of value. We can see that the history of the *will to truth* has settled nothing, it has only bred questions, such that it always seems as if it has just begun. Is it not time to raise the question of the value of this *will to truth*? But to raise the question of something’s value is not an affront to its value. In other words, that Nietzsche wants to question the value of the *will to truth* does not necessarily mean that he is against the *will to truth*. Instead, he merely wants it to be permitted that truth is questioned. That nothing is taken for granted, that he does not fall victim to some kind of dogmatism that sanctifies the *will to truth* as beyond criticism and reflection.

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 40.

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 33.

But it is easy to see how by the simple fact of the questioning of the *will to truth*, it is no longer *will to truth* as I have defined it above. In other words, one is under the auspices of the *will to truth* so long as one allows the *will to truth* itself to be the arbiter of all value; allows it to be the judge of everything worthy in life; allows it to force him to sacrifice every other impulse for its greed for truth. Whenever another drive or impulse is called upon to weigh and give value to the *will to truth*, its tyranny over the individual is broken; since necessarily, within the individual something else has arisen that is doing the valuing, and the exclusive right that the *will to truth* had on the domain of valuing is broken. Therefore, any skepticism about the value of truth necessarily means that the person is not anymore tyrannized by the *will to truth*,

The unconditional importance, the blind self-centeredness, with which every morality treats itself wants there not to be *many* moralities, it wants no comparison and no criticism, but rather unconditional belief in itself. It is, thus, in its very essence anti-scientific – and for that reason alone the perfect moralist would have to be *immoral*, beyond good and evil. – but is science then still possible? What is the search for truth, truthfulness, honesty, if not something moral? And without these valuations and the corresponding actions: how would science be possible? Is skepticism in morality not a contradiction... as soon as the skeptic ceases to consider these finer evaluations of the true to be authoritative, he no longer has reason to doubt and to study: *unless the will to knowledge were to have quite another root than truthfulness*.⁴⁷

This other route to truthfulness which Nietzsche alludes to will be my concern in the third chapter.

There are, then, two senses in which Nietzsche does not reject truth. First, Nietzsche's analysis of metaphor and concept is itself an affirmation of the search for the truth. But it is an affirmation of a definition of truth that is devoid of delusions about

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Nietzsche: Writings From the Late Notebooks*, Section: "Notebook 35, May – July 1885," 155, note 5.

how adequate our ability to get at the real nature of things is. Even the use of metaphor aims, for Nietzsche, to get at truth: “Here all things come caressingly to your speech and flatter you: because for they want to ride on your back. Here you ride on every metaphor to every truth.”⁴⁸ These kinds of truths for Nietzsche are truths of life, they are deep truths about what is healthy and what kind of way of living is the healthiest, and what aspects of life betray a nihilistic and decadent will.

However, there is another kind of truth that Nietzsche does not reject: the truths of science. This is what Nietzsche refers to when he talks about subduing and controlling the knowledge drive. He merely wants the scientist to be a human being before he is a scientist, as opposed to being a human being only as a venue for being a scientist, which betrays a rejection and resentment of life.

Nietzsche’s Late Notebooks Discussion of the Concept of Truth

In the late notebooks, Nietzsche harshly criticizes the concept of a thing-in-itself. He makes very clear statements about how the idea of a thing-in-itself is a “nonsensical,”⁴⁹ “dogmatic,”⁵⁰ “idle hypothesis”⁵¹ “with which one must break absolutely.”⁵² It is conceivable how this might be construed as support for the interpretation that Nietzsche rejects the concept of truth completely. However, a closer

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo*. In Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings. Edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Section: Thus Spoke Zarathustra, #3, 127.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, p. 302, aphorism 558.

⁵⁰ Ibid., aphorism 559.

⁵¹ Ibid., 303, aphorism 560.

⁵² Ibid., aphorism 559.

look at the argument in these writings reveals dissatisfaction with the *definition* of the thing-in-itself.

Nietzsche criticizes a specific formulation of the thing-in-itself. There is some kind of unknown which we “constitute” as interpreters. This act of constitution includes the concepts of causality, thinghood, unity, and self-identity. Thus, Nietzsche rejects the formulation which claims that the thing-in-itself is a thing and that it is itself—i.e., that it is self-identical. He does not reject the idea that there is some unconstituted, unformulable unknown which we ourselves constitute and shape into the world we live in. He says: “the antithesis of this phenomenal world is not ‘the true world,’ but the formless unformulable world of the chaos of sensations.”⁵³

As we have seen, from analysis of his criticism and as we will see below from his own practice, Nietzsche does not reject truth or metaphysics in general. He rejects a certain formulation of metaphysics which is really motivated by the *will to truth*, which, for Nietzsche, is essentially a will to falsify reality. He defines the *will to truth* as “a making firm, a making true and durable, an abolition of the false character of things.”⁵⁴ The *will to truth* is a tool to falsify because it refuses, or is unable, to see the world as it is. It makes firm, it orders, it quantifies, it unifies, it introduces cause and effect, and so, the *will to truth* “is a word for the ‘will to power.’”⁵⁵

Nietzsche criticizes the lack of intellectual integrity on the part of philosophers because they do not see that even their *will to truth* is not based in some real, ideal,

⁵³ Ibid., 307, aphorism 569.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 298, aphorism 552.

⁵⁵ Ibid..

better realm and thus superior to the rest of humanity which lives in this world of change, but in fact is based, like everything in this life, in the will to power, in the will to assimilate, to gain an edge and an advantage: the *will to truth* is no more than a manifestation of the will to power.

A distinction, then, is made between ideal metaphysics and descriptive metaphysics; and Nietzsche makes a prolonged, sustained effort to link traditional metaphysics to morality and moralizing. He says: “logic of my conception: morality as a supreme value (master over all the phases of philosophy, even over the skeptics). Result: this world is good for nothing, it is not the ‘real world.’”⁵⁶ This is the reason for the rejection of traditional metaphysics, because they were prescriptive, life-depreciating metaphysics.

Nietzsche then introduces the idea of metaphysics of centers of force, which is an attempt to make sense of what is left after we reject the constitution that the interpreter does to the unknown. He says that “every center of force adopts a perspective toward the entire remainder, i.e., its own particular valuation, mode of action, and mode of resistance. The ‘apparent world,’ therefore, is reduced to a specific mode of action on the world, emanating from a center. Now there is no other mode of action whatever; and the ‘world’ is only a world for the totality of these actions. Reality consists precisely in this particular action and reaction of every individual part toward the whole.”⁵⁷ This metaphysics aims simply to explain and describe the underlying mechanism which

⁵⁶ Ibid., 254, aphorism 461.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 305, aphorism 567.

creates this world. It lacks the objectionable aspect of rejecting and denying this life by creating ideals over and above it, and for this reason is not a tool of the *will to nothingness*. Of his metaphysics, Nietzsche says: “the world, apart from our condition of living in it, the world that we have not reduced to our being, our logic and psychological prejudices, does not exist as a world ‘in-itself’; it is essentially a world of relationships; under certain conditions it has a differing aspect from every point; its being is essentially different from every point; it presses upon every point, every point resists it—and the sum of these is in every case quite incongruent.”⁵⁸

Nietzsche’s Position on Truth: Interpretations

According to Sarah Kofman, Nietzsche’s position is a rejection of truth for the sake of metaphor. His new standard for evaluation is not the “truth or falsity of a given system... not to prove or disprove them... the system must be evaluated not in terms of its truth, but in terms of its force and beauty.” Thus the old dichotomy of truth/falsity is rejected for the sake of the new perspective of evaluation from the point of view of the beautiful and quantity of force. The important question to ask about a philosophy or a system is whether “through its means, the philosopher affirmed or denied life. The metaphorical style indicates the fullness of life; just as the ‘demonstrative’ style indicates its poverty... favoring concepts reveals a *will to nothingness*, an adherence to the ascetic ideal.” We can see then that for Nietzsche the shift of emphasis is from one style to another. From the nihilistic style of subjecting life to reason through constantly designing concepts and categories for life to fit in, to the open-ended style of the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 306, aphorism 568.

metaphor that embraces vagueness and lack of conceptual clarity as a return to the innocence of life, to the preconceptual, where an interplay of a preponderance of instincts are at play “as opposed to a single one (i.e., knowledge).”⁵⁹ It is in this sense that plurality, and tension gain importance for Nietzsche. We all live in the tension of our instincts (defined broadly to include the drive to knowledge), however, those who know how to live in a higher tension and on the edge as in a battle between their instincts are the ones that are the stretched bows out of which the arrow of the overman will be released.⁶⁰ So, from this, we can conclude that Kofman’s Nietzsche rejects any kind of *interest* in truth as a decadent way of living.

This squares well with what Richard Rorty says about Nietzsche on truth: “It was Nietzsche who first explicitly suggested that we drop the whole idea of ‘knowing the truth.’ His definition of truth as a ‘mobile army of metaphors’ amounted to saying that the whole idea of ‘representing reality’ by means of language, and thus the idea of finding a single context for all human lives, should be abandoned.”⁶¹ Rorty’s position here, however, is more radical. He bases his interpretation of Nietzsche’s position on the quote from the essay “Truth and Lies in the Extra-Moral Sense,” which may be seen as Nietzsche’s most radical utterance on truth.

These two interpretations and much of “Truth and Lies” point in the direction of a Nietzsche who wants to wash his hands of the concept of truth completely, and wants

⁵⁹ Kofman, “Metaphor, Symbol, Metamorphosis,” 210.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface, 32.

⁶¹ Rorty, Richard. “The Contingency of The Self.” *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*. Ed. Daniel W. Conway. (London: Routledge, 1998), 307.

us to have nothing to do with it. However, they lack the sophistication of Nietzsche's mature position in the *Genealogy*, where Nietzsche explicitly reformulates his issue with truth and presents us with the genealogical analysis needed to understand his frustration with the concept. It is not that Nietzsche wants us to overcome the whole perspective of truth/falsity, but, as I have tried to show in the first section of this paper, he asks us to rein in our *will to truth* and subjugate it to the concerns of life. He wants us to reject truth and not seek it if it makes us sickly creatures.

Schacht, on the other extreme of the spectrum, argues that Nietzsche is concerned with truth for the sake of truth. He says, "it is sometimes suggested that his (Nietzsche's) concern with the question of the existence of God actually went no further than this – with the consequences of the decline of belief in a transcendent deity; that whether or not there really is a God was an issue of little or no importance to him; and that this is the sort of metaphysical question of which there can be no meaningful discussion, except in terms of the practical consequences of believing one thing or another. This construal of Nietzsche, however, is profoundly mistaken."⁶² In saying this, Schacht is partially right. For Nietzsche, truth is not of no importance at all. Humanity itself is a product of this ascetic ideal according to which we developed in a way that we are dependent on the perspective of truth in order to understand and comprehend the world. Completely ignoring the concept of truth would be tantamount to refusing to let the philosophical discussion get off the ground. So, Nietzsche needs truth in order to be convincing. But Schacht also rejects the interpretation that Nietzsche thinks that the

⁶² Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche*, Series: Arguments of the Philosophers, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1983), 120.

quest for truth can *only* be meaningful in terms of “practical consequences of believing one thing or another.” This means that Schacht’s Nietzsche is still within the worldview of the *will to truth*, because he seemingly refuses to allow any kind of external concern to outweigh truth. Schacht’s position seems to reject the possibility of any kind of will to regulate the use of truth, and thus the will that leads truth is nothing but the *will to truth* itself. In his other book, *Making Sense of Nietzsche*, Schacht also says, “Nietzsche renounces neither the conception of any sort of truth deserving of the name, nor its pursuit (contrary to the claims of some of his recent interpreters).”⁶³ So, unlike the above quote which limits Schacht’s position to the question of God’s existence, Schacht believes that, on a more general scale, Nietzsche upholds the ideal of truth, and he thinks that it would be a misinterpretation to say that Nietzsche is unconcerned with it for its own sake.

In *Making Sense of Nietzsche*, Schacht continues to reject the thesis that Nietzsche denies the pursuit of truth,⁶⁴ however without indicating whether he means the pursuit of truth as a subdued endeavor, serving other ends, or the pursuit of truth for the sake of truth. Since he seems to argue for the latter meaning in his other book *Nietzsche*, I will assume there is no change of heart and that he means that Nietzsche does not reject the pursuit of truth for its own sake. He says: “the philosophical endeavor Nietzsche champions is likewise concerned above all with the pursuit of a kind of ‘truth’ that is not merely a matter of fidelity of thought and expression to the way things are, even though

⁶³ Richard Schacht, *Making Sense of Nietzsche*, Series: International Nietzsche Studies, ed. Richard Schacht (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 163.

⁶⁴ Ibid..

it presupposes their clear and candid apprehension. More importantly, it also relates to what may become or be made of human life, and therefore, of life and the world more generally, as the merely natural is transfigured and higher forms of existence are attained.” With Schacht’s rejection of the possibility that, for Nietzsche, practical concerns govern our truth-seeking, it becomes clear that this quotation simply boils down to the traditional definition of truth. To clearly and candidly apprehend the truth about the way things are, is to uphold a belief that there is a certain way that things are which we have to mimic or apprehend or represent. But, then, this is merely the old conception of truth; Schacht is just emphasizing Nietzsche’s interest in the traditional concept of truth with regards to both past and future. The same concept is used, only now it is applied to what possibilities there are and how to achieve them. Therefore, Schacht’s attributes to Nietzsche interest in the traditional conception of truth for the sake of truth.

In *Genealogy*, Nietzsche calls the *will to truth* the purest form of the ascetic ideal, as decadence in its strongest seductive appeal. The scientists of the age are precisely the most decadent because they have cleared the ground around the ascetic ideal of all objectionable constructs, myths and lies. However, they have not rid themselves of faith. “This ideal is precisely their ideal, too; they themselves embody it today and perhaps they alone; they themselves are its most spiritualized product, its most advanced front-line troops and scouts, its most captious, tender intangible form of seduction – if I have guessed any riddles, I wish that this proposition might show it! –

They are far from being free spirits: for they still have faith in truth.”⁶⁵ The problem with the scientists is that they are led along by the *will to truth* which they are not allowed to question as scientists. For Nietzsche, a concern for truth is not an objection. But it is an objection if the concern for truth is merely for the sake of truth. This is precisely what Schacht seems to be denying. He denies that Nietzsche is for the concern for truth *only* when it is motivated by practical concerns. Nietzsche says: “Consider on this question both the earliest and most recent philosophers: they are all oblivious of how much the *will to truth* itself first requires justification... because truth was not permitted to be a problem at all.”⁶⁶

It is obvious then that Nietzsche does not sanction the *will to truth* as a driving force. His criticism of the ascetic ideal forces him to deny the *will to truth* any leading or fundamental role in life. He relegates the fundamental role to values, and value creation. Only then can the *will to truth* be allowed as a subdued tool, as a means, but never as a leading will, never as an end in itself.

In the *Will to Power*, Nietzsche subsumes science under the banner of the *will to truth*, “truth, that is to say, the scientific method, was grasped and promoted....”⁶⁷ Thus, the *will to truth*, in its purest form of simply seeking the truth, not only requires justification; it is criticized for not creating values, and indeed Nietzsche questions whether the *will to truth*, or science, is at all able to create values. “Science is not nearly

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 150.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Quoted in Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche*, Series: Arguments of the Philosophers, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1983), 90.

self-reliant enough to be that (the opposing ideal to the ascetic ideal); it first requires in every respect an ideal of value, a value-creating power, in the service of which it could believe in itself – it never creates values.”⁶⁸ It appears then that Nietzsche is saying that truth is not only forbidden a leading role, but it simply cannot play this role. The leading role is always for values, for the service of which the *will to truth* can be employed. However, those who think they are getting rid of the ascetic ideal by espousing a *will to truth* are really merely revolving around the same God that the old forms of the ascetic ideal worshipped: Faith.

The main shortcoming of Schacht’s analysis of Nietzsche, in both of his books mentioned, is that there is a lack of serious consideration of Nietzsche’s discussion of the *will to truth* in the *Genealogy* by Nietzsche. Of course, there are many discussions of the method of genealogy; in fact, Schacht’s whole interpretation of Nietzsche’s position on truth is based on an understanding of this method in *Nietzsche*; however, Schacht does not tell us how exactly Nietzsche applies the method of genealogy to the concept of truth in the *Genealogy*. Thus, Schacht’s analysis of Nietzsche’s view of truth remains incomplete, and lacking in consideration of Nietzsche’s strongest and deepest discussions of the concept.

Another reason why Schacht’s extreme view is lacking, is that even if we grant him his main thesis that Nietzsche’s interest in truth is a leading will, not governed or humbled by life-conditions and life-concerns, there results two problems: first,

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 153.

concerning Schacht's analysis of Nietzsche's argument against the existence of God; second, we get a very unpalatable inconsistency in Nietzsche's thinking.

Schacht interprets Nietzsche's argument against the existence of God as follows: he believes that Nietzsche is still arguing from a truth-worldview and that his repudiation of the metaphysical concept of God, for example, is based on the fact of the origins of the God-hypothesis is in fiction, superstition, needs (shown by the genealogical analysis) which can "hardly be denied... their origins and motivations render them suspect; and the unavailability of any cogent arguments telling in favor of them must be conceded to tell strongly against them in light of this fact."⁶⁹ So, Schacht interprets Nietzsche to be saying that the combination of the genealogical origins of the God-hypothesis and the lack of other arguments for this hypothesis make the "genuineness of the possibility upon which the issue centers is to be discounted. Once a possibility has been recognized to be spurious, there ceases to be any point in continuing to discuss the issue it poses;" and he finds this argument to be "decisive."⁷⁰ However, if this were really Nietzsche's purpose in using the genealogical method against the concept of God, if one of his aim was to show that God does not exist (simply for the aim of showing that God does not exist), then we might expect him to discuss "arguments telling in favor" of the God-hypothesis and show that they actually are not cogent. But Nietzsche neither does this, nor does it seem in line with Nietzsche's project to do this. There is something anti-Nietzschean about dealing with proofs and showing where they go wrong. If this really

⁶⁹ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 129.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

were Nietzsche's argument against the existence of God, it is nowhere near "decisive" so long as it fails to address the arguments in favor of God's existence and show how they fail to demonstrate it.

The other problem is that Nietzsche says that sometimes truth must be ignored or rejected for the service of life. However, if Schacht is right that, for Nietzsche, truth is allowed the role of a leading will, then it seems that it is impossible to reject any truths from any other perspective. If truth is the goal, the aim, then we cannot say that we want some truths and not others, because there is no will that dominates and humbles this *will to truth*; nothing is admitted over and above truth, as a source of value. Truth and value-source are united in one. Thus, if we agree with Schacht, then we would have to think of Nietzsche's position as very shockingly confused and inconsistent; so much so, that it does not seem to be understandable. In my interpretation of Nietzsche, he realizes that we are receptors conditioned by a certain process, and this process creates beings that can only be convinced of something if that thing claimed some truth. In the *Genealogy* he says: "Apart from the ascetic ideal, man, the human animal, had no meaning so far."⁷¹ So, the ascetic ideal, in its purified form, the faith in truth, is a kind of perspective on life that we think through, it is all we know; any other language, then, is going to sound awfully odd, especially if it gets rid of truth altogether. In this respect, he says in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "The falseness of a judgment is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgment: it is here that our new language *perhaps sounds strangest*."⁷² It

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 162.

⁷² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 35, my emphasis.

will sound strange because it is against our conditioning, it is a new language, a new symbolism, we have to develop new ears for new meanings.

Thus, there is no contradiction in the use of truth just because it is subordinated. However, Schacht seems to want it both ways. First he wants truth to be subordinated, and second he wants truth to be a leading will. At times, he says that Nietzsche is interested in truth for truth's sake; while at others he says that the leading will for Nietzsche, what is of the highest value is "the strengthening and enhancement of life which is what he takes in the final analysis to matter most."⁷³ This creates the contradiction in the cases where whatever will is subordinating truth picks beliefs that are false. I.e., there cannot be two leading forces at the same time. If we ought to ignore some truths that are antagonistic to the mission of the enhancement of life, then truth seems to be subordinated to this other concern; and if truth is subordinated to this other practical concern. However, Schacht rejects this as profoundly mistaken as in the quotation above.

In his discussion of the idea of the soul in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche says: "To be sure, when the new psychologist puts an end to the superstition which has hitherto flourished around the soul-idea with almost tropical luxuriance, he has as it were thrust himself out into a new wilderness and a new mistrust – it may be that the older psychologists had a merrier and more comfortable time of it –: ultimately, however, he sees that, by precisely that act, he has also condemned himself to *inventing* the new –

⁷³ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 117.

and, who knows? Perhaps to *finding it*.—”⁷⁴ So we see again that for Nietzsche the interest in truth is subordinate to some other interest, the finding of truth is only incidental, it is the subject of the question: “who knows?” which almost amounts to a “who cares?” The question of truth is only incidental, the primary action, the leading will ought to be one that is creative, and creation is always creation toward an end; and this end ought to be bettering the conditions of life.

Of course, Nietzsche is not opposed to figuring out truths about what sorts of things actually enhance and strengthen life and which things do not. This kind of truth-seeking, however, does not pose a problem to the interpretation provided here. Nietzsche is not opposed to the pursuit of truth in general. He is only critical of the will to the truth as a final aim, without any qualifiers or limits, or higher governing concerns. In fact, Nietzsche in several places praises truth and the pursuit of truth, and explains how “‘these coming philosophers’ are to be thought of as ‘new friends of ‘truth,’”⁷⁵ and “a philosopher must have the liveliest intellectual conscience, and a steadfast determination to tolerate nothing that critical scrutiny reveals to be ‘unworthy of belief.’”⁷⁶ They are not new friends of truth in the sense that truth is their master-aim. To the contrary, they use their analysis to find out what things enhance and strengthen life (to this end critical scrutiny is employed) in order to promote strength and boldness. “And knowledge itself: let it be something else for others... -- for me it is a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings, too, find places to dance and play. ‘Life as a means to knowledge’

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 44.

⁷⁵ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 110.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

– with this principle in one’s heart one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily too.”⁷⁷ The important thing to discern here, as Schacht points out, is that Nietzsche justifies this concept by its effects: it enables him to live boldly and to laugh gaily. Thus, again we are returned to the conditions of the enhancement of life.

* * *

Ultimately Nietzsche is against *faith* in the truth, he is not antagonistic toward having an interest in truth. He wants this faith which he terms *will to truth* to be questioned, delimited, tamed, so that it no longer has the absolute power over all things, which it had for the scientist. Something now has the right to govern the *will to truth*, and use it to achieve other goals. Right before he criticizes the “unbelievers,” the “last idealists left among philosophers,” as being the purest form of the ascetic ideal, and, thus, far from being this ideal’s opponents, he says: “we ‘men of knowledge’ have gradually come to mistrust believers of all kinds.”⁷⁸ Thus, it becomes clear that Nietzsche’s objection is against faith – the faith in truth. Those so called free spirits “are far from being *free* spirits: *for they still have faith in truth.*”⁷⁹ Nietzsche emphasizes the word free in this quote, because faith, for him, is a kind of un-freedom, a kind of enslavement. One does not own oneself, there is a taboo that is beyond one’s power, one does not have clearance to question, one has faith. Nietzsche sees this as a remnant of a defeated worldview that must be overcome. Thus, to free oneself of the enslavement, one must rid oneself of faith; one must cease to be a believer in every respect; one must

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 255, aphorism 324.

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 148.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

give oneself license to venture any hypothesis, to ask any question. So, it becomes clear then that Nietzsche's target in the *Genealogy* is faith. He is not attacking the use of truth or interest in truth but faith in and *will to truth*. The big question then is what exactly does the elimination of the faith in truth amount to?

Rejecting faith in truth means that there is another arbiter that is going to submit truth to questioning, and for Nietzsche the only thing that is worthy of such a task is the will to the enhancement of life. The *will to truth* is not rejected in itself, but it is made to abdicate its role as the highest meaning of the earth. Now, the *will to truth* is just another subject; and the will to strength, courage, and living gaily ascends to the throne. They are what justifies any interest in knowledge or truth: “‘Life as a means to knowledge’ – with this principle in one's heart one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily too.”⁸⁰ What redeems the will to knowledge is that it still affords one to live boldly and gaily.

Now, with the *will to truth* rejected as a leading force and affect, the focus shifts to something else, to the preservation of life, to the advancement of life, and to life conditions, instead of truth. Even the falsest judgments are admissible in the search for that which advances life the most; falseness is no longer necessarily an objection to a judgment. Thus the great question is answered. “The falseness of a judgment is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgment... the question is to what extent it is life-advancing, life-preserving... and our fundamental tendency is to assert that the falsest judgments (to which synthetic judgments a priori belong) are the most indispensable to

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Quoted in Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 117.

us, that without granting as true the fiction of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical, without a continual falsification of the world by means of numbers, mankind could not live – that to renounce false judgments would be to renounce life, would be to deny life.”⁸¹ All this culminates in what? Points to what? It points to Nietzsche’s lack of concern for whether what promotes life is actually true. A higher goal lurks above mankind: self-enhancement.

So, the *will to truth* is rejected as a kind of faith in truth, while the use of truth is not rejected. Nietzsche talks of “these coming philosophers” who are “new friends of ‘truth.’”⁸² “We have abolished the real world: what world is left? The apparent world perhaps? ... but no! with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!”⁸³ The real world is abolished and with it the apparent world. What does this mean for Nietzsche? We surely cannot remain in the sphere of a *will to truth* and make such a statement, for it is incoherent from that perspective. It can only mean an overcoming of the *will to truth*, of all metaphysics based on the *will to truth*, based on determining what the thing in itself is, based on absolutes. Otherwise, one would be right in wondering with Derrida about whether Nietzsche was saying anything meaningful at all... This end of metaphysics, what does it amount to? “Its secret is rather the possibility that indeed it might have no secret, that it might only be pretending to be simulating some hidden truth

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 35.

⁸² Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 110.

⁸³ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 51.

within its folds.”⁸⁴ The abolishment of both real and apparent worlds is a redefinition of the kind of will that gains ascendancy, or that should gain ascendancy when we philosophize.

Nietzsche sees himself as the ascetic ideal turning against itself, he sees himself as the culmination of this long process in history, as a product of all those he criticizes as having fallen victim to this ideal, it is for this reason that the beginning must be called forth to contribute to the ending of this page of history; for this reason Zarathustra himself must be brought to do the deed. For from Zarathustra, the beginning, until Nietzsche, the beginning of the end, there is some kind of unity, and there is much of what Zarathustra started, i.e., of Zarathustra, in Nietzsche. Thus, after so many hundreds of years of pregnant illness the ascetic ideal finally realizes the need to overcome itself.⁸⁵ It recognizes itself as a problem. With the rejection of the *will to truth* as a purer form of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche’s philosophy is faced with the task of rejecting and overcoming the whole history of humanity. The question thus becomes: What does Nietzsche wish to substitute for this history? What does he hope for humanity’s future?

⁸⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Spurs*, Trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 133.

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 88.

CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM OF HEALTH AND TRUTH'S PLACE

What we have seen so far is that Nietzsche criticizes the will to truth. He does not reject the concept of truth any more than he rejects concepts in general; nor does he seek truth for the sake of truth. Instead, he suggests that we should go beyond this whole framework within which the will to truth develops. He suggests that we should let another will--that of the enhancement of life--be dominant. How do we escape the *will to truth*? What is this vague direction that Nietzsche wants us to move toward? What does health, the enhancement of life, amount to?

In this chapter, I will explain Nietzsche's view of the world consisting of two types of forces—the active and the reactive. He puts forth the argument that history has been the history of nihilism understood as an expression of the *will to nothingness* that has taken over western humanity by several means, including taboo (enforced by external use of force), conscience, and otherworldly authority figures. He sees his task as that of countering the tools through which the reactive forces actualize their triumph over the active forces. However, he cannot present us with a clear way to fight nihilism itself. Nietzsche did not view himself as the destroyer of nihilism and its foremost tool: resentment. But he points toward a form of life free of resentment, and suggests several general ways of possibly clearing the way for such a form of life to become possible.

The body and the emphasis on physiology are supposed to ground us within our bodies and self-interest. This self-interest is the most important countermeasure and

protection humans can use against the force of nihilism and its depreciation of life. Life is the body, through which we discover a richness of instincts and drives, which is the second clue Nietzsche gives: we ought not to allow the tyranny of one drive over all others and to distance ourselves from the tyranny of the *will to truth* which contemporary culture encourages. The key to counter reaction is being diverse and in control of one's instincts, even as one develops them to their full potential. Finally, this development of the different and differing instincts and drives will necessarily cause contradictions as they strive for different things. The energy for defeating nihilism itself is hoped to be reached by the advent of sovereign individuals who diversify themselves and become more complete human beings—that is, more complete animals—in that they are in touch with a considerable amount of energy that their conflicting drives have to offer. But this is not Nietzsche's task but that of those who come because of him.

Nihilism

Nietzsche believes that throughout history, a will has been gaining strength and getting purer and stronger as time progresses: the *will to nothingness*. The force of nihilism is the purest manifestation of that will. Nihilism is the process of becoming reactive of active forces. In individual human beings, it occurs when the active forces are overwhelmed by the reactive forces.⁸⁶ At this juncture, the self turns on itself and instead of venting its feelings and accomplishing its desires on the outside world, it releases its cruelty in self-mutilation (a more detailed account of this is given in Chapter II). In nations, nihilism is the force of disintegration that gains the upper hand when nations

⁸⁶ See my discussion of Nietzsche's view on the development of memory, and prudence in Chapter II, section 2.

and cultures grow weak and the richness of a people is narrowed down and slowly eliminated until only the conditions under which one type of man in the society can survive. This process of eliminating boundaries and distance between the types of human beings “means that they should resemble each other in their needs and demands—more clearly: that they should perish.”⁸⁷ This “demand for ‘humanization’ (which quite naively believes itself to possess the formula for ‘what is human?’) is a tartuffery, behind which a quite definite type of man seeks to attain domination: more exactly, a quite definite instinct, the herd instinct: the tendency to make men more and more alike.” The herd instinct which wishes to make everyone and everything equal is the paradigm case of nihilism. It aims at making everyone and everything the same, equally boring, and thus reduces the value of life, because it reduces interest in it.

From this picture of history, we can see that the popular way of looking at Nietzsche as an existentialist who believes in history that basically repeats itself meaninglessly generation after generation, is inadequate or at least incomplete. The fact that Nietzsche’s foremost concern is about the strengthening of nihilism and its overwhelming of everything noble in life, means that he cannot be thought of in terms of the Greek cycles, with future generations experiencing, more or less, the same affects, conflicts, having the same chances of revolt, the same energies available to be actualized. Nietzsche believes that the forces of reaction are growing stronger with time, and that history does not proceed in cycles. His most intense fear is that the death of God will cause humanity to weary of life, i.e., of itself; and that the possibility of a dawn

⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 174, aphorism 315.

based on the realization of God's death, might actually turn into an unhinging of the Earth that makes life aimless, meaningless, and stupid. Nietzsche's 'madman' from the *Gay Science*, expresses these fears very poignantly: "'Whither is God' he cried. 'I shall tell you. We have killed him—you and I...Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now?... Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?'"⁸⁸ One of the most important metaphors used here is that of the possibility of the earth's moving away from all suns. The sun is the source of life, and without it humanity would perish, and Nietzsche wonders whether we will have the strength to steer the earth into new suns or whether we would prove to be weaker than our deed of killing god. But why is nihilism such a huge threat to everything noble?

Nietzsche argues that nihilism is an underlying force in history that has used Judaism, Christianity, and countless other beliefs systems in order to bring down all the strong types and make everyone and everything meek and mediocre. This process is inimical to any kind of originality, creativity, or independence, and it feeds on the conglomeration of the weak into groups in order to overpower the stronger types of life whose instinct is to depend on themselves and on their strength unlike the herd which conglomerates and thus depends on others for its well-being.

⁸⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Gay Science." *The Portable Nietzsche*, Ed. And Trans. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), 96.

As history progresses, this force is becoming purer and more refined. From the Judaic priesthood, to Christ on the cross, the symbol of the guilt and bad conscience through which Christianity conquered the Roman (a stronger type of man). Then Protestantism and the reformation, and the enlightenment's *will to truth* which then completely breaks with the idea of God. "Christianity as a dogma was destroyed by its own morality."⁸⁹ All those are purer and purer forms of this *will to nothingness*, and point to its tremendous power, adaptability, and cleverness.

Nietzsche believes that this force poses the greatest threat to life in general. The possibility of this force's triumph over every sign of strength and power in life is the possibility of turning life into an emasculated, equalized, boring thing, such that it is empty of life though it is living (biologically speaking); in other words, it is a life not worth living--the life of the subdued, tamed, obedient animal lacking in courage, strength, intensity and style.

Nihilism and Types of Forces

According to Nietzsche there are different types of forces. "Reactions cannot be grasped or scientifically understood as forces if they are not related to superior forces – forces of *another type*."⁹⁰ So, there are reactions, and superior forces of another type. Forces, for Nietzsche, can either be reactive or active ones. The active forces are the ones that affirm themselves, their strength, their pride, their power. Reactive ones, on the other hand, define themselves in reaction to the active forces. Thus reactive forces,

⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 161.

⁹⁰ Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Tr. Hugh Tomlinson. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 42.

initially dominated by the active forces, are then grouped together and joined by the force of nihilism and devise a clever war of feelings and trick the active forces into giving up their domination by developing a conscience and denouncing their actions, desires, tendencies, they are taught to “leave their actions in the lurch.”⁹¹ This is how active forces become reactive, and what Deleuze calls the “becoming-reactive of forces” which is triumphant everywhere and whose mechanisms, “ressentiment, bad conscience, and nihilism...are the foundation of the humanity in man.”⁹²

So, we are overwhelmed by the reactive, our whole being, our whole life, our existence is that of reactive force, of the subdued animal. Nietzsche’s solution to this dilemma is that we should, therefore, overcome our humanity, which is in its essence too weak to counteract nihilism, so we should overcome it in order to make way for the possibility of the becoming active of forces. We should move forward beyond man, into the realm of the overman, which is the kind of being that is able to affirm everything and leave behind all ressentiment, bad conscience and nihilism. But how do we move toward the overman and how do we prepare the way for him? How are we to counteract nihilism and stop the marching triumph of reactive forces?

The Problem of a New Direction, Nietzsche’s Task

The new direction becomes a problem when we realize that Nietzsche does not quite know how to achieve what he wants it to amount to. Perhaps it is in the nature of the problem to be unknowable before it is achieved, but Nietzsche does not know how to

⁹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Section Maxims and Arrows, p. 33, aphorism 10: “Let us not be cowardly in the face of our actions! Let us not afterwards leave them in the lurch!”

⁹² Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 64.

achieve this becoming-active. His philosophy is a philosophy of destroying limits placed on human existence by the reactive forces. He sees his task as the unveiling of different concepts that nihilism employs in order to separate the active forces from their force. Thus, since the becoming reactive of active forces is based on nihilism's employing certain concepts as tools to control the strong; by counteracting those tools, Nietzsche thinks he can make way for the possibility of the development of some stronger type of man that is actually capable of fighting nihilism itself—as opposed to simply its tools, or symptoms. “Philosophy, as I have so far understood and lived it, means living voluntarily among ice and high mountains—seeking out everything strange and questionable in existence, everything so far placed under a ban by morality.”⁹³ For example, he attacks the concepts of free will, conscience, responsibility, not because they are false, but because the price of moral improvement, of which these concepts are tools, is the “unhinging of reason, reduction of all motives to fear and hope (punishment and reward)... the implanting of a ‘conscience’ which sets a false knowing in place of testing and experiment: as if what should be done and what (is) left undone had already been determined—a kind of castration of the seeking and forward-striving spirit; in summa: the worst mutilation of man that can be imagined presented as the ‘good man.’”⁹⁴ The false knowledge is false here, not because it is not true, but because it claims to be true, when it is not; that is to say, it is a false hope. Worse yet, it is a false

⁹³ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo*. Tr. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 218.

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 91, aphorism 141.

hope that prevents human beings from experimenting and stands as a barrier between humans and what they can do.

Nietzsche places the *will to truth* under the rubric of this very process of nihilism which he is adamant should be overcome. However, he does not know where this overcoming of reaction will lead us, he does not know how to get there either. Kaufmann says that Nietzsche leaves this task for the value-legislating philosophers who, according to Nietzsche, had not yet existed before him nor at the time he was writing. From this, Kaufmann concludes that Nietzsche did not consider himself one of those future value-legislating philosopher, and that he saw his task somewhere else.⁹⁵ The only thing left for him to suggest is for us to experiment, and find our own ways of reaching the overman. In this search lies the significance of our lives: “what is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under.”⁹⁶

However, there are many reactive forces that stand in the way between man and experimentation. These forces set up rules and laws, and create consciences within man that internalize those rules and laws against experimentation, against the new and the creative. Zarathustra has come as the great liberator, as the destroyer of the laws and tools of the reactive: “behold the good and the just! Whom do they hate most? The man who breaks their tables of values, the breaker, the lawbreaker; yet he is the creator.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Kaufmann, Walter. “Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist.” Third Edition. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968), 108.

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. The Portable Nietzsche*. Tr. and ed. by Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 127.

So, Nietzsche does not think that his role is to tell us where or what the overman is; where the pains and sufferings, where the denials and affirmations, affirmations of denial, in short, where all this experimentation will get us. Instead, he analyzes the human from the perspective of the future, of a future race that is not subdued externally, that does not run away from itself, and its realities, and the end of its reality: death.⁹⁸

Regardless of the emphasis that modernity and humanism place on the individual, they are mere avatars; veils that the reactive forces of negation hide behind. The *will to truth* figures in this project as just another veil behind which this process hides. This will's seductiveness will claim many who agree that the old world-order must be overthrown. But they have not delved deep into the old world-order and have not realized that the *will to truth* does not present a new world order but merely changes the king, the head, the ruler. They do not understand that the analysis must be much deeper. The force of history is much deeper than rulers and kings, who have little force and power compared to the whole framework of reaction that engulfs mankind.

Some examples of those who have failed are Kant, who posits a vague conception of a universal Reason in the place of God; and Hegel, who strengthens and grounds this universal Reason and empowers it with the motor of historical analysis; he grounds it in reality and makes it concrete. The transformation Nietzsche calls for is much more radical and deep. "It is self-deception on the part of philosophers and

⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 135.

⁹⁸ 'future race' here does not refer to humanity. I am referring to the race of overmen. I think that Nietzsche believes in distinction, difference, (and reality) too much to assert something like all of humans becoming overmen in the future, at least if the overman is interpreted, as I interpret it here, as a high ideal of self-control, sovereignty, and elimination of resentment.

moralists if they believe that they are extricating themselves from decadence when they merely wage war against it. Extrication lies beyond their strength: *what they choose as a means, as salvation, is itself but another expression of decadence; they change its expression, but they do not get rid of decadence itself.*"⁹⁹

When revaluations aim at overcoming a whole history, a species of being, a most entrenched form of life, when it is self-destructive, self-denying, and self-transforming, when it aims at fighting against a maze of deceptive, veiled forces that are the cleverest, deepest and profoundest forces to ever exist; when one takes on such burdens, the result will often be without success. The burden and the weight of this task will destroy most of those who will dare venture on such a journey. It is the willingness to undertake such a task, knowing full-well what the bets are, that makes it a tragic endeavor.

It is often claimed that Nietzsche's relevance is diminished by the esoteric nature of his writings, the vagueness and the unwillingness to clearly chart out a future for this direction he wants humanity to move toward. This is a misunderstanding. Nietzsche's destructiveness is part of a greater positive project. It is not that Nietzsche was unwilling to chart out the way for the future philosophers, or the way to the future life forms he prophesies. On the contrary, he believes that this venturing into uncharted seas, this self-realization as a project without limits, without charting, without clearly demarcated maps, or bright outposts of light is what is needed. That is what will help us find and experiment in different ways to overcome reaction. Anything and anyone can easily be compromised and infected or seduced by the forces of reaction, or simply run out of

⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 478, aphorism 11.

energy and degenerate. The false lures of the reactive life are great. Perhaps greater than any human can resist or see through. But they remain false lures. “Verily a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea to be able to receive a polluted stream without becoming unclean. Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this sea; in him your great contempt can go under.”¹⁰⁰

Nietzsche gives us outlines of a way of life that will come if humanity has the strength to move toward it, if humanity possesses the power to overcome itself. It is a journey to no one specifically designated place, to new seas, more importantly, to unknown seas. The philosophers of the future are expected to have the constitution for such hardship, for such hard suffering, and such uncertainty. Furthermore, there are no guarantees. The possible roads and paths to history’s and humanity’s self-overcoming are infinite, with many that will probably lead nowhere, lead back to reaction, or to undesirable futures, and many will waste their lives in this fashion, “I love him who wants to create over and beyond himself and thus perishes.”¹⁰¹

The Necessity of Cheerfulness

Affirming life comes in at this juncture. Living for the journey, and having the power to live an experimental life: that is the distinction of those who wish to pursue this task. Affirming life in all its aspects amounts to the strength of those world-creators. Having no regrets, no bad conscience, no judgments against life, against one’s life, against one’s past. That is only possible for those most serious of philosophers. Their

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 125.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

path is crooked to say the least. They have no use for straight paths, for straight paths are the mark of a clear destination, or a goal, which the new philosophers lack. “One remains young only as long as the soul does not stretch itself and desire peace... one has renounced the great life when one renounces war.”¹⁰² “profound aversion to reposing once and for all in any one total view of the world. Fascination of the opposing point of view: refusal to be deprived of the stimulus of the enigmatic.”¹⁰³ However, their only straight path is their overall affirmation, their lack of judgment against life. Affirmation vaguely amounts to a perspective of cheerfulness on life. It is a necessity because as embodied beings, our feelings are what governs our perspective on life. Nietzsche is not saying that there is this task that human beings should aim for and it is very exhausting so rest a little from time to time and be cheerful. On the contrary, cheerfulness is the key to overcoming resentment. It is not an oasis to which one retreats after long periods of “serious work,” but it is our serious work itself. If we do not manage to live cheerfully, i.e. affirmatively, then we will be that much far away from achieving the overman. We must be able to love our fate and be satisfied with it.

Despite Nietzsche’s belief that affirmation amounts to having no bad conscience, he does not mean to reject its usefulness completely. “You run ahead? Are you doing it as a shepherd? Or as an exception? A third case would be the fugitive. First question of conscience.”¹⁰⁴ So, even the new philosophers, the paradigm for whom is the exception, have a conscience, but their conscience is pure and innocent. It answers to no God, nor

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 488, aphorism 3.

¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 262, aphorism 470.

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 472, aphorism 37.

to any absolute reason whether attached or detached from the historical; it is the conscience that preserves seriousness in the face of care-free living, purposelessness, free-roaming, lost living; which are the stamps of the *will to nothingness*. “The revaluation of all values, this question mark, so black, so tremendous that it casts shadows upon the man who puts it down—such a destiny of a task compels one to run into the sun every moment to shake off a heavy, all-too-heavy seriousness.”¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche is not advocating the condemnation of seriousness. However, being engaged in something so dangerous and serious as a revaluation of all values, requires a heavy seriousness which the new philosophers must find ways to shake off in order to rejuvenate their strength to continue in their seriousness. “I understand by ‘freedom of spirit’ something quite definite: being a hundred times superior to philosophers and other disciples of ‘truth’ in severity towards oneself, in cleanliness and courage, in the unconditional will to say No where it is dangerous to say No—I treat previous philosophers as contemptible libertines hiding in the cloak of the woman ‘truth.’”¹⁰⁶

Why Nietzsche’s Open-ended Solution Is Dangerous

What makes Nietzsche’s project so hard is that there are avatars of a similar life produced by the reactive forces; the life that is care-free, purposelessly purposeless, free-roaming, and lost.

Just as there is a lowly and vile prudence of the weak, so is there a noble and proud prudence of the strong; a cowardly and weak cruelty as well as courageous and strong cruelty; a pessimism that is a symptom of exhaustion and decomposition as well as a pessimism that manifests itself a superabundance of

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, preface, 465.

¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 257, aphorism 465.

energy, that constitutes a kind of luxury of strength. The need for destruction and change can be the expression just as much of an exuberant and overflowing strength as of a hatred and malcontent in the face of what is. In the same way, the need for stabilizing, fixing, and 'externalizing' can come as much from generosity and happiness as from rancor and a morbid desire to perpetuate suffering and unhappiness.¹⁰⁷

However, for Nietzsche, the new philosophers are so serious as to be scholars in search of their vague and unclear aim and target. Their distinctive character is their seriousness; that is what distinguishes them from the aimless nihilists. Furthermore, their cheerfulness is what distinguishes them from the serious scholars who are still under the tutelage of the *will to nothingness* and the ascetic ideal. The new path is only fit for those who have a great energy and who know how to dispense with and rejuvenate their energy cheerfully. Their cheerfulness comes from their taking joy in creation. They are the signs of the ascending forms of life, which affirm life (i.e. affirm themselves) and do not judge, nor condemn it, nor demand of it what the nihilist demands and what it cannot grant. The nihilist is at heart and by nature destructive, and represents the descending form of life.

The new philosophers, on the other hand, are not overburdened by false hopes and impossible ends and ideals, and if they do, they know how to shed off these harmful skins--they have light feet. The nihilist is the opposite of the creator because he is burdened by the weight of judging and demanding, where he should obey and listen to life's demands. He is the traditional philosopher whose frustrations with life have always made him come to it with predetermined demands. He wants to affirm only part of life;

¹⁰⁷ Haar, Michael. "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language." *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1977), 20.

the orderly, the reasoned, the weighable, the straight line. It is this that always betrays the nihilism in him. Their philosophies are reactions against life; against life they affirm the eternal, the orderly, the rational. They affirm their hopes and dreams of a safe, subdued, danger-less, and predictable life—that is, a life with which they can manage not to be frustrated.

Nietzsche's Role, Physics, Physiology vs. Reaction

Given this sketch of an experimental life which for Nietzsche is to be the road to the overman, what is the role that Nietzsche plays? I have suggested that Nietzsche saw himself as the breaker of the old laws that prohibit too much and condemn too much. But how does he do that?

Here, Nietzsche's statement that the new philosophers must be scholars is important. Nietzsche himself, in living the scholarly life of reading, thinking, contemplating, analyzing, and perhaps, especially, engaging in critique is himself a scholar. He studies and contemplates the different dams that reactive forces have put against the flow of the river of active forces. His method of destroying these dams is by presenting an analysis of the reactive forces based on the new perspective of physics, physiology and the body. Since "moral values (are) illusory values compared with physiological (ones),"¹⁰⁸ he aims to start a counter movement against the reactive forces and their tools, a countermovement whose tools are grounded in physiology. "The body and physiology the starting point: why?—we gain the correct idea of the nature of our subject-unity, namely as the regents at the head of a communality (not as 'souls' or 'life

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 210, aphorism 392.

forces'), also the dependence of these regents upon the ruled and of an order of rank and division of labor as the conditions that make possible the whole and its parts."¹⁰⁹ So, we "start from the body and employ it as a guide"¹¹⁰ because it holds the essential key; that of understanding our "self" as a hierarchical structure, correctly.

Arthur Danto says that for Nietzsche "every problem reduced to a problem of psychology."¹¹¹ It might be added that, for Nietzsche, all questions of psychology boil down to ones of physiology and those to questions of force and power. In this reduction, Nietzsche can show how the hopes and dreams of the priests are nothing but "poisonous vapors;"¹¹² in the hope that this will help the active forces which are separated from their force to overcome their internal impediments to action. It is in this that they will be hoped to be scholars, they have to be scholars insofar as they have to rid themselves of the ascetic ideal, and understand Nietzsche's, in part scholarly, counter movement.

Against the decadent tradition of *will to truth*, Nietzsche hurls his admiration for physics and the physiological. In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche says "we must be physicists in order to be creators in that sense-whereas hitherto all appreciations and ideals have been based on ignorance of physics, or in contradiction thereto."¹¹³ This emphasis on physics is the new perspective on life, combined with his fascination with physiology in

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 271, aphorism 492.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 289, aphorism 532.

¹¹¹ Danto, Arthur. *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 72.

¹¹² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 210, aphorism 390.

¹¹³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aphorism 335.

Twilight of the Idols, I believe, constitutes his method of overturning the effects that the reactive forces have had on the active forces.

The sages of reactive force, he argues, have a common *physiological ground*, they constitute a type in themselves. It is for this reason that they have shared in their judgments against this life. “The consensus of the sages—proves least of all that they were right in what they agreed on: it shows rather that they themselves, these wisest men, agreed in some *physiological* respect, and hence adopted the same negative attitude to life—had to adopt it.”¹¹⁴

Their reason for the adoption of an anti-life perspective on life has been that the passions are too dangerous, that they will destroy anyone who dares indulge them. That the life of the passions and desires devalues life. Nietzsche, on the other hand, argues that although “all passions have a phase when they are merely disastrous, when they drag down their victim with the weight of stupidity;”¹¹⁵ eliminating the passions completely is tantamount to the elimination of life. Thus, this fight against the passions is absurd. He likens it to “dentists who ‘pluck out’ teeth so that they will not hurt anymore.” Christianity has waged a war of extirpation against the passions, when a more “intelligent” war would have been one of beautification and spiritualization.¹¹⁶ Instead of this battle of extirpation, Nietzsche proposes “an ‘immoral’ mode of thought, which wants to develop both the good and the bad qualities in man to their fullest extent, because it feels it has the strength to put both in their right place—in the place where

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, section: “The Problem of Socrates,” 474, aphorism 2.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., section: “Morality as Anti-Nature,” 486, aphorism 1.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., section: “Morality as Anti-Nature,” 487, aphorism 1.

each needs the other.”¹¹⁷ This is what Nietzsche wants to do with the concept of truth. He does not wage a blind war against the concept, but seeks to beautify and spiritualize it into something that contributes to a healthy human being. He does not want truth as tyrant, but as a good servant. Nehamas explains: “Nonmoral asceticism is an affirmative phenomenon because it denies some pleasures only in order to acquire others and to secure a better life in this world. Moral asceticism *radicalizes* this denial, negates all pleasure, and downgrades the whole world.”¹¹⁸

The new philosophers then, are a certain type of human being. They do not oppose their passions and senses completely. They know how to control their passions for their own purposes. If they reject a desire at a given time, it is because they think it clashes with a nobler desire they have. They affirm themselves as a certain type of physiology which they must learn how to live as. Every type affirming its own physiology, this is the maxim that Nietzsche wants us to live by: “a well-turned out human being, a ‘happy one,’ *must* perform certain actions and shrinks *instinctively* from other actions; he carries the order, which he represents physiologically, into his relations with other human beings and things.”¹¹⁹ Out of all these self-affirmations of the different types of physiologies, a birth of a new species is hoped, the will to the overcoming of resentment and nihilism is hoped to be found. One type of human being that will develop is what Nehamas calls the nonmoral ascetic who “glorifies one specific type of

¹¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 256, aphorism 464.

¹¹⁸ Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. (Cambridge: Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), 1985, 124.

¹¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, section: “The Four Great Errors,” 493, aphorism 2.

earthly life among others; it does not condemn the pleasures it avoids. It does not consider that there is something inherently wrong with them and that they should therefore be avoided by all... Nonmoral ascetics need not dogmatically expect that others will benefit if they too deny the pleasures they themselves avoid. They have no reason for such an expectation since they have no reason to believe that the life of the philosopher, which they want to secure for themselves, is good for everybody. Such ascetics, therefore, need not be interested in legislating what is and what is not proper for others to seek and avoid.”¹²⁰ Thus, the new philosophers will not be judges of life, they will not condemn where they see difference. Surely, they will affirm their difference, but not in a reactive way. Their affirmation of difference springs, primarily, from self-assurance, not from a judgment against the other.

By understanding Nietzsche’s physiological perspective, we can see how his philosophy is an ethical message for us to accept our limits, to revel in our finitude, to live our life within this finitude and within those limits, and be able to affirm what such a life would broadly amount to. This is not as easy as it sounds, affirming the whole of being means affirming much in the world and ourselves that is ugly and decadent. However, Nietzsche’s interpretation, his basic assumption, his starting point is nihilism. Therefore, his whole philosophy turns on this point. No one who disagrees with Nietzsche about the nature of history as a process of “active forces becoming reactive”¹²¹ (decadence) will ever fully grasp his main project, his over-arching concern,

¹²⁰ Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 115.

¹²¹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 64.

the “something tremendous,” as he calls it, the “crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience”:¹²² nihilism as the advent of the last stage of this history, as the endpoint of this process of degeneration. That is first and foremost his concern. If we fail to discover, share, experience, even “smell” this truth with Nietzsche, then the kind of urgency he speaks to, the kind of intense expectation and excitement, the sense of danger, the sense of worry for everything worthy, the sense of personal revolt against this process of nihilism, the sense of what is at stake will be for the most part lost; and Nietzsche will sound like a crazy man indeed. But if we focus on this urgency and see his project of overcoming man from this vantage point, we can appreciate the depth of his concerns and maybe find something to learn about ourselves, our lives, and how we wish to live. This is all good and well, but how do we achieve it?

Richness in Contradictions

In his discussion of Nietzsche’s position on contradictions, Nehamas says: “style, which is what Nietzsche requires and admires, involves controlled multiplicity and resolved conflict.”¹²³ Right before this quote he says: “an admirable self, as Nietzsche insists again and again, consists of a large number of powerful and conflicting tendencies that are controlled and harmonized.” The problem with these statements, it might be suggested, is that they are very definitive. “Harmony,” and “resolved conflict” sound much stronger than what Nietzsche thinks ought to be achieved. The admirable man does not *resolve* conflicts, he strings his bow to the greatest extent possible, i.e., he

¹²² Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 326.

¹²³ Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 7.

grows and cultivates contradictions and conflicts within himself for the purpose of achieving tension and depth of living and feeling. To resolve internal conflicts and seek harmony, for Nietzsche, is just what the person stuck in the perspective of truth would want to do.

Conflicts are not even to be controlled, even that is too strong for what Nietzsche prescribes because controlled conflicts and tensions are born out of cowardice; one is not daring enough to string one's bow to its limit, one takes the safe bet of easy contradictions that one can resolve and control. But Nietzsche prescribes courage, and boldness of spirit, he prescribes to us that we die at the right time, and all this cannot be squared with the prudence involved in controlling, harmonizing, and resolving one's inner conflicts. One such contradiction Nietzsche wants us to be able to live with concerns truth.

Nietzsche says that he wants to substitute: "in place of 'epistemology,' a perspective theory of affects (to which belongs a hierarchy of the affects; the affects transfigured; their superior order, their 'spirituality')." ¹²⁴ So, truth for Nietzsche is something that is affective, it is a felt experience, and the affective is the deepest-rooted epistemological resource we possess. ¹²⁵ Primarily for this reason, and because any comprehension of a so-called "fact" is not possible without the affective, and because affects change and differ, the art of interpretation gains a unique flavor. At the same time, for Nietzsche, there is this great tension between two levels of consciousness. The

¹²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 255, aphorism 462.

¹²⁵ Poellner, Peter. "Affect, Value and Objectivity." In *Nietzsche and Morality*. Edited by B. Leiter and N. Sinhababu. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 229.

first affirms that “there are no facts (truths), only interpretations,” and the second affirms that the afore-mentioned statement is a truth. It is between this necessary tension that the new philosophers shall live. The paradoxity of this state of existence is that it wants to affirm the relativity of truth and affirm truth’s relativity as an objective truth at the same time. Nietzsche says with regards to his perspectivism: “granted this too is only interpretation – and you will be eager enough to raise this objection? – well, so much the better.”¹²⁶ It is not in some synthesis of this dilemma, some resolution, that Nietzsche’s position on truth lies; but in the dilemma itself. Nietzsche never took his task to be the resolving of contradictions, because, to the contrary, he thinks that “the price of fruitfulness is to be rich in internal opposition.”¹²⁷ So, he thinks that contradictions are necessary for the harnessing of tension, energy and “richness” necessary for an active life. This dilemma reappears in other places in Nietzsche. For example, he asserts a certain type of what has been construed as a metaphysics of becoming and of force, and at the same time he asserts that this metaphysics is only an interpretation. But what is crucial is that he says not only that it is an interpretation, but an interpretation by a certain type of force (which all interpretation is). But this second apparent concession is no concession at all; the relativist, wishing to make sure Nietzsche was on his side will surely ask the question: but this whole viewpoint about forces, is just your perspective? And Nietzsche’s answer is going to be: it is the perspective or the interpretation of the forces that constitute him. At face value we can just say Nietzsche was a metaphysician

¹²⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 53, aphorism 22.

¹²⁷ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, section: “Morality as Anti-Nature,” 488, aphorism 3.

of truth in the old sense, because he never clearly and wholly rejected the idea of objective truth; but at the same time, we could just as well conclude that for Nietzsche everything is interpretation, and therefore his view on truth devolves into some kind of relativism. What is important to keep in mind here is that for Nietzsche the truth about truth itself is not very important, this is the realm of empty concepts¹²⁸ where discussion is futile. What is important is the preservation of this tension between two opposing forces that want to claim ascendancy in us. That too is just interpretation... of forces.

This argument for contradictions, however, is not to be understood as learning to live with the absurd. It is not simply that one affirms contradictions that is admirable, but the type of life it indicates behind the contradictory affirmations. Because there will always be contradictions and incoherencies in our understanding because of our limited intellects, not being threatened by the prospect of contradictions that seem just as plausible is a sign of a healthy perspective. It means that the person is less likely to develop a grudge against life because of the inescapable inability to decide which of the two contradictory ideas is the truth.

Another reason why contradictions are a good sign, is that they indicate underlying contradictory impulses in the self believing them. It is because we have passions that we develop ideas, and because we have passions that we stick to some of them and not others, i.e., that we *believe*. Thus, making one's peace with contradiction means one can explore different passions and harness the energy of more perspectives, without the need of one passion destroying another.

¹²⁸ Ibid., section: "Reason in Philosophy," 481, aphorism 4.

Nehemas best characterizes the nature of the uncertainty and lack of concrete ground in which this contradictoriness leaves us. “Yet it is not clear how one can argue for a position, as Nietzsche often clearly wants to do, and yet not suggest that this position is, to use the only possible term in this context, true. Is Nietzsche, then, trapped in an impasse of his own creation?” One of Nietzsche’s philosophical purposes is to overcome the dictatorship of the boring and unhealthy passion for truth and only truth. Does Nietzsche, thereby, trap himself in an impasse? Yes and no. Nietzsche’s point of view is that we should live in this impasse, in this lack of concrete ground, we should build our homes on the slopes of Vesuvius.¹²⁹ We should live experimentally, always changing, always evolving, growing, shrinking, and in this becoming lies our being.¹³⁰ If we keep looking at the issue from a truth perspective, what Nietzsche gets into definitely looks like an impasse, in the negative sense of the word. But for Nietzsche, what the truth perspective demeans and devalues as negative impasse is a positive thing. What makes it positive is that it reminds us of the futility and unhealthiness of asking the questions of the old truth perspective. To want to overcome the truth perspective and then ask whether your new status as beyond the truth perspective is actually *true* shows that the attempt at overcoming the truth perspective has failed, because the question itself is part of that perspective. Even the demand for clarity and the formulation of the whole worry above that Nehemas presents smells of the residue of the perspective of truth. At different times, Nietzsche argues for different positions for different reasons;

¹²⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Tr. and ed. by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1974, aphorism 283.

¹³⁰ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 48.

some because they are true, some because they are interesting, or provocative, or dangerous, or because they challenge entrenched beliefs that have grown old, weary, and decadent; because they rejuvenate energy and create tension, or because they “spur” us to live boldly and actively. To insist on reducing all this multitude of reasons to the arbitration of the concept of truth, i.e., to the underlying passion which wants truth in us, is to be stuck in the old and unhealthy perspective of the *will to truth*. Nietzsche’s different reasons for believing different things are a testament to how varied and rich his passions must have been, and perhaps to how well he met the challenge that he puts forth for us. But after a few moments reflection it seems probable that Nietzsche, as a certain form of life, or physiology, affirms itself in his philosophy by glorifying the life that is rich in contradictions, which is nothing more than the physiology that it is.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, what I learned in writing this thesis is that the obsessional relation to what a philosopher said points, perhaps, to more than a simple interest. To be engaged in a project of finding the real Nietzsche or the true Nietzsche for the sake of finding out what Nietzsche really said is an exercise in nihilism. It is extremely interesting how Nietzsche managed to develop a style that is inherently averse to any kind of truth-based interpretation of the kind mentioned above. Nietzsche should be read in order to derive lessons from his experience in life. He is to be read in order to leave our shackles behind and to risk something in life; we should learn from him to expect of ourselves more than to be good worshippers, or good citizens, or moral agents. He wants us to break the shackles of sameness and of the equalization of everything, of making everyone the product of the same set of instincts and thus producing the same replicas in society. He wants us to dare the unknown and to try to be different, he wants us to flirt with disaster and with the volcano, with trouble, motion, becoming, overcoming, change, living on the edge of the general humankind which is burdened by its fear of the unknown, and which heavily moves forward with the weight of *will to nothingness* bearing on it.

The logical next step in research, I believe, are the different metaphysical principles which Nietzsche puts forth: Will to Power, Overman, Eternal Recurrence. I have avoided analysis of these specific metaphysical principles because they would have complicated my project and made it much more than I was able to accomplish for a

master's thesis. But how these principles fit into the metaphysical framework I have argued for above is a very interesting question to look into.

It is a cliché statement that one is amazed by Nietzsche's ability to penetrate through to the depths of his culture even before the world wars, the defeat of so many traditions in the 20th century and the current war on terrorism. It is interesting to look into what kinds of lessons we can learn from Nietzsche's psychological analysis about what exactly is going on in the world right now: the clash of civilizations as it is called. What connections does globalization and the clash of civilizations have with respect to our tendency toward nothingness?

Nietzsche's philosophy lends itself to many possible uses, and it is a shame that with respect to putting him to contemporary use in trying to analyze current worldly problems and finding solutions, he is forgotten. My next research step is to try to apply some of the concepts of Nietzsche's philosophy to an analysis of the current political/economic/military situation that faces the world. How far are we as a world community from producing strong sovereign individuals who would redeem the "tremendous surplus of failures: (the) field of ruins?"¹³¹

¹³¹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 380, aphorism 713.

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